



MLA Statement on protecting library staff

April 21, 2020

In this time of uncertainty, reliable information and community support are among our most trusted and valuable resources, and the Massachusetts Library Association's members, as do all librarians and library workers in the Commonwealth, provide both of these services every day. Massachusetts Library Association (MLA) encourages and champions the numerous important contributions that library workers make to their communities in the form of trusted information resources, entertainment, companionship, early childhood education, job seeking, information literacy, skill building and more.

MLA recognizes that the dangers posed by the COVID-19 virus outweigh the benefits of operating public-facing libraries and information organizations for in-person services during this public health crisis. Accordingly, MLA supports decisions to close such facilities until public health and medical experts determine that it is safe to reopen them. At the same time, MLA encourages government, business, and academic leaders to take a long-term view and begin preparing for the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. A critical step in this process is retaining and fully compensating library workers regardless of their paid position in their organization.

There is significant work that library workers can accomplish remotely, including digital and phone outreach and information literacy programs to help communities better connect and navigate their online services and environment. Layoffs and furloughs undermine libraries' important work in preparing communities to learn, connect, evaluate information and thrive during any and all extenuating circumstances. Libraries that layoff now will have communities that are less prepared for the subsequent outbreaks of COVID-19 that many public health officials fear will come later in 2020.

Libraries are among the only institutions advocating and supplying services such as education, outreach, and internet access to marginalized populations--seniors, people with disabilities, lower and middle class workers, people experiencing homelessness, survivors of domestic violence, new immigrants, English language learners, and far more. The work of libraries may be more crucial than ever right now as they strive to offer ongoing virtual programming, information literacy instruction, free media access, personalized outreach, and technology support to their communities. Because libraries are trusted and respected sources in their communities, they reliably and efficiently spread much needed health information and learning resources during these unprecedented times of social displacement. It is for these reasons that MLA strongly urges the full

retention of library staff who are actively connecting with their communities and providing reliable, trustworthy services and support to their communities and partners online.

Furthermore, MLA believes that library workers are especially vital in the aftermath of a catastrophe. Libraries have been and will continue to be the place where people go to complete their unemployment applications, apply to new jobs, or work on new resumes. Libraries are major outlets for official municipal information. We expect an increase in materials circulation because of information and educational needs and new hobbies developed in quarantine.

MLA calls on every employer in the Commonwealth to support all library workers by recognizing their value, retaining them as employees regardless of position type and including them in post-pandemic plans.

Signed,

MLA Executive Board

